NCA
VOC FOR PGM/FN
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ELECTING A POPE -- THE MECHANICS

ANNCR:

WHEN 111 CARDINALS OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH SECLUDE THEMSELVES THIS FRIDAY EVENING (F.Y.I. 7 PM ROMAN TIME) IN THE VATICAN'S SISTINE CHAPEL TO ELECT A NEW POPE THEY WILL BE FOLLOWING A RITUAL VIRTUALLY UNCHANGED FOR THE PAST FOUR CENTURIES. VOA'S JULIAN GORSKI HAS SOME DETAILS ON THE PAPAL ELECTION PROCESS:

VOICE:

THE APOSTOLIC PALACE, WHICH HOUSES THE SISTINE CHAPEL AND ADJOINS ST. PETER'S BASILICA, IS BEING SEALED OFF FROM THE OUTSIDE WORLD. SECURITY PRECAUTIONS, AIMED AT PREVENING ANYONE BUT THE ELECTORS FROM KNOWING WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE CHAMBER, ARE SAID TO BE THE STRICTEST IN THE CHURCH'S 2000 HISTORY. EACH CARDINAL HAS BEEN RESTRICTED TO AN ABSOLUTE MINIMUM OF PERSONAL AIDES. PARTICIPANTS WILL BE REQUIRED TO TAKE AN OATH UNDER PAIN OF EXCOMMUNICATION NEVER TO DIVULGE ANYTHING EVEN REMOTELY CONNECTED WITH THE VOTING PROCESS. A SPECIAL TEAM OF ELECTRONIC EXPERTS IS SCANNING THE CHAMBERS OF THE PALACE FOR CONTRABAND LISTENING DEVICES OR OTHER MONITORING APPARATUS.

THE SISTINE CHAPEL IS READY TO RECEIVE THE ELECTORS. THE CELLS TO WHICH THEY WILL BE CONFINED WHEN NOT BALLOTING WILL ALSO SERVE THEM AS SLEEPING QUARTERS DURING THE EXPECTED HOT AND HUMID AUGUST ROMAN NIGHTS.

AFTER MASS AND PRAYERS FOR DIVINE GUIDANCE, THE CARDINALS WILL ASSEMBLE IN THE CHAPEL ADORNED BY MICHAELANGELO'S FRESCOES OF THE LAST JUDGMENT. THEY WILL TAKE THEIR PLACES ON CHAIRS LINING THE RIGHT AND LEFT SIDE OF THE MAIN ALTAR.

THE CARDINALS MAY CHOOSE ONE OF THREE MODES OF ELECTION: BY UNANIMOUSLY NAMING A CANDIDATE; BY SECRET BALLOT IN WHICH TWO THIRDS OF THE VOTE CAST PLUS ONE -- OR 75 VOTES IN THIS ELECTION -- WOULD BE REQUIRED TO ELECT A NEW POPE; OR BY A METHOD KNOWN AS "DELEGATION." THIS LAST SYSTEM IS PRESCRIBED FOR POSSIBLE USE IN CASE OF A DEADLOCK. THE CARDINALS THEN CHOOSE 9 TO 15 OF THEIR MEMBERS TO DECIDE ON A CANDIDATE AND THE DECISION IS BINDING ON ALL.

IN AN EFFORT TO FORESTALL A LONG CONCLAVE, POPE PAUL ALSO PROMULGATED A LAW ALLOWING FOR THE ELECTION OF A POPE BY A SIMPLE MAJORITY FOLLOWING SIX DAYS OF FRUITLESS BALLOTING.

ACCORDING TO AN ANCIENT CUSTOM, THE OUTSIDE WORLD WILL BE KEPT ABREAST OF THE PROCEEDINGS BY WATCHING THE COLOR OF THE SMOKE BILLOWING FROM A THIN CHIMNEY ATOP THE SISTINE CHAPEL AND CONNECTED TO A STOVE SET UP IN THE VOTING CHAMBER.

TWICE BEFORE NOON AND TWICE IN THE AFTERNOON THE SMOKE WILL RISE. IT WILL COME FROM THE BURNING OF BALLOTS TREATED WITH SPECIALLY PREPARED CHEMICALS. IF THE SMOKE IS BLACK IT WILL MEAN AN INDECISIVE BALLOT. A WHITE PUFF WILL TELL THE THOUSANDS WATCHING IN SAINT PETER'S SQUARE AND MILLIONS AROUND THE WORLD THAT THE 263RD SUCCESSOR TO PETER THE FISHERMAN HAS FILLED THE VACANCY CREATED BY THE DEATH OF PAUL THE SIXTH.

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